

Preface

What is isolation and quarantine?

Isolation and quarantine are public health techniques used to contain the spread of infectious diseases. Isolation is a standard public health practice applied to persons who have a communicable disease. Quarantine is a contact management strategy for persons exposed to a disease that consists of active monitoring in addition to activity restrictions. Both techniques may be voluntary or mandatory. Isolation and quarantine require the separation of infected and potentially infected persons, respectively, from the public. This separation is achieved by confinement of the infected and/or potentially infected person(s) to treatment facilities, residences, or other locations, depending on the nature of the implicated disease and the available facilities. Thus, both isolation and quarantine measures may severely curtail the freedom of persons to whom they are applied, particularly in the case of diseases characterized by prolonged incubation periods.

When should isolation and quarantine measures be used?

In many cases, individuals will voluntarily undertake isolation and quarantine measures at the request of the state or local health department. Indeed, mandatory isolation or quarantine measures should only be effected when other measures (such as written health agreements or health directives issued pursuant to Indiana Code § 16-18-2-166) have failed. Extensive information sharing should occur between the affected individual and public health officials so that the individual may be completely and properly advised of his/her condition and the requirements for compliance with those measures that are instituted by the public health authority to protect the public's health. The affected individual should be told the rationale for the imposition of restrictions to facilitate his understanding that these measures are the least restrictive, medically necessary measures to take. Public health agencies may face stiff consequences, including the payment of damages and the loss of public trust, for unreasonably imposing mandatory isolation or quarantine. While exigent circumstances may require the mandatory imposition of restrictions on an individual, even without their prior notice, voluntary compliance is the favored first alternative.

What is contained in these materials?

The epidemiological and clinical data available to the public health authority drive the decision determining whether the issuance of isolation or quarantine orders is an appropriate control measure. Public health staff, along with legal counsel, must coordinate in advance to ensure an efficient response. These materials contain a summary of the legal authorities allowing a public health authority to obtain and issue isolation and quarantines orders. Also included are sample petitions and model orders to be filled in as factually and clinically appropriate.